

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF MAINE

BRENT ELISENS,

Plaintiff,

v.

MAINE STATE FORENSICS DHHS,
et al.,

Defendants

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1:22-cv-00387-JDL

RECOMMENDED DECISION AFTER REVIEW
OF PLAINTIFF'S COMPLAINT

Plaintiff filed a complaint and an application to proceed without prepayment of fees, which application the Court granted. (Complaint, ECF No. 1; Amended Complaint, ECF No. 5; Application, ECF No. 2; Order, ECF No. 4.) Because Plaintiff has been granted leave to proceed without prepayment of fees, a preliminary review of Plaintiff's complaint, as amended, is appropriate. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2).

Following a review of Plaintiff's amended complaint, I recommend the Court dismiss the amended complaint.

DISCUSSION

The governing statute, 28 U.S.C. § 1915, is designed to ensure meaningful access to the federal courts for those persons unable to pay the costs of bringing an action. When a party is proceeding without prepayment of fees, however, "the court shall dismiss the case at any time if the court determines," *inter alia*, that the action is "frivolous or

malicious” or “fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted.” 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B). “Dismissals [under § 1915] are often made sua sponte prior to the issuance of process, so as to spare prospective defendants the inconvenience and expense of answering such complaints.” *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 324 (1989).

When considering whether a complaint states a claim for which relief may be granted, courts must assume the truth of all well-plead facts and give the plaintiff the benefit of all reasonable inferences therefrom. *Ocasio-Hernandez v. Fortuno-Burset*, 640 F.3d 1, 12 (1st Cir. 2011). A complaint fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted if it does not plead “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007). “A self-represented plaintiff is not exempt from this framework, but the court must construe his complaint ‘liberally’ and hold it ‘to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers.’” *Waterman v. White Interior Sols.*, No. 2:19-cv-00032-JDL, 2019 WL 5764661, at *2 (D. Me. Nov. 5, 2019) (quoting *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007)). This is “not to say that pro se plaintiffs are not required to plead basic facts sufficient to state a claim.” *Ferranti v. Moran*, 618 F.2d 888, 890 (1st Cir. 1980).

Plaintiff alleges a state forensic psychologist, a state administrator, and an attorney who was apparently appointed to represent Plaintiff in a state court criminal matter violated his constitutional rights and defamed him in connection with a forensic examination in the state court matter.

Under *Younger v. Harris*, 401 U.S. 37 (1971), federal courts generally abstain from the exercise of jurisdiction when a petitioner seeks relief in federal court from ongoing state criminal proceedings. See *Sprint Communications, Inc. v. Jacobs*, 571 U.S. 69, 78 (2013) (noting that *Younger* “preclude[s] federal intrusion into ongoing state criminal prosecutions”); *In re Justices of Superior Court Dept. of Mass. Trial Court*, 218 F.3d 11, 16 (1st Cir. 2000) (“The federal courts have long recognized the ‘fundamental policy against federal interference with state criminal proceedings.’” (quoting *Younger*, 401 U.S. at 46)). Abstention is called for “when the moving party has an adequate remedy at law and will not suffer irreparable injury if denied equitable relief.” 401 U.S. at 43-44.

The elements of mandatory abstention consist of the following: “(1) the [state] proceedings are judicial (as opposed to legislative) in nature; (2) they implicate important state interests; and (3) they provide an adequate opportunity to raise federal constitutional challenges.” *Bettencourt v. Bd. of Registration in Med. of Commonwealth of Mass.*, 904 F.2d 772, 777 (1st Cir. 1990). Plaintiff does not assert that the state criminal proceedings have reached a final resolution, and the date of some of the alleged conduct, September 27, 2022, suggests the state court proceeding is most likely still ongoing. The criminal proceedings referenced in the complaint are judicial in nature, implicate important state interests associated with the State’s administration of its laws, and the state court system affords Plaintiff an adequate opportunity to raise federal constitutional challenges. Abstention, therefore, is presumptively appropriate and I discern no reason for the Court not to abstain.

CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing analysis, after a review of Plaintiff's complaint pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915, I recommend the Court dismiss Plaintiff's amended complaint.¹

NOTICE

A party may file objections to those specified portions of a magistrate judge's report or proposed findings or recommended decisions entered pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(B) for which de novo review by the district court is sought, together with a supporting memorandum, within fourteen (14) days of being served with a copy thereof.

Failure to file a timely objection shall constitute a waiver of the right to de novo review by the district court and to appeal the district court's order.

/s/ John C. Nivison
U.S. Magistrate Judge

Dated this 19th day of December, 2022.

¹ Even if the Court were to determine Plaintiff's state law defamation claim did not implicate the *Younger* doctrine, the Court should decline to exercise supplemental jurisdiction over Plaintiff's state law defamation claim. See 28 U.S.C. § 1367(c)(3).